INTERVIEW | TOM BAKER (THE FOURTH DOCTOR) - PART 2

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In October 1982, Tom Baker became Sherlock Holmes in the BBC adaptation of Conan Doyle's HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1981). Following in the (television) footsteps of the likes of Peter Cushing, Douglas Wilmer, Luis Hector, Stewart Granger, Christopher Plummer, had Tom extensively researched the part?

"No, I find the films a bit amusing. A lot of actors have played Holmes but the thing is that modern audiences are completely influenced by the image of Basil Rathbone. It was like when I took over **DOCTOR WHO** , I was nervous because I thought, *"Christ! You know Jon Pertwee's really jumped on it very hard."* He was very popular, as you know and he worked like a dog to promote it. So I thought, *"Christ! How am I going to follow that?"*

But of course you can only do your own version of it. Then I realised that on **DOCTOR WHO** it doesn't matter who's doing it because it's the formula that is bigger than the actor in front of it because of the amazing flexibility that it has.

You see one of the marvellous things about **DOCTOR WHO** is that, done reasonably well, it's in an area where there's no competition. I mean **SPACE 1999**, **SAPHIRE AND STEEL**, **STAR TREK**: those are earnest, rather too earnest whereas **DOCTOR WHO** isn't anything like that.

When I went to America, the reception in Los Angeles was absolutely stupefying. I could hardly keep my face straight. There were only a few children there, mostly young adults like you, all taking it extremely seriously and reading all sorts into the stories or into my character that I'd never thought of. Of course I couldn't say, *"Look here, you know it's a load of bullshit!"* I was doing a job. I couldn't really disappoint them or disenchant them but I was surprised at their obsession with it."

Having spoken so kindly about Pertwee and Troughton, had Tom ever met William Hartnell?

"No, I never met him. Of course, I would have liked to but apparently he was very irascible at the end of his life because he wasn't very well. I would have liked to have met him like I'd met the others. Peter Davison? I was very familiar with his work on television. Patrick is the one I know the best, I think."

DOCTOR WHO is known for having a tight budget and a quick rehearse-record turnaround. The possibility of problems at a high premium. Did things frequently go wrong during the filming?

"Well quite often small things went wrong, like the scarf getting tangled up which caused me to fall about the place. They always re-took those scenes but I longed to leave them in because that's what happens if you wear a ludicrous scarf."

During the filming of THE SONTARAN EXPERIMENT (1975), Tom had injured himself but had the scarf caused the accident.

"Oh, **THE SONTARAN EXPERIMENT**, the very first one. I had a terrible fight in that. I'd forgotten about that one. I broke my shoulder on the very first episode. After that I got very interested in how to stage and how to cope with fight sequences. Then I discovered that terry Walsh was a brilliant 'stand-in' and stunt double for me especially in mid-distance shots. They cut in close for the dialogue from me and pulled wide for Terry Walsh, who was a marvellously conscientious stunt double and also a very good friend to me.

I remember in a TARDIS sequence in the studio an entire TARDIS fell in because it was only made up of four sides and a roof. There was this juddering sequence and they hadn't got the pins in properly and the whole place fell around me. I wondered what the hell was going on! I think that was one directed by Douglas Camfield."

We suggested that the story could have been THE SEEDS OF DOOM (1976).

"**SEEDS OF DOOM**? That's right. It was winter scene. There was a wonderful actor in it called Tony Beckley who played the villain."

Tony Beckley played Harrison Chase.

"He used to wear gloves. He's died since then, I was horrified. An excellent actor. Very good in those spooky roles; very smiley and gentlemanly with them. Really terrifying."

If he hadn't secured the DOCTOR WHO role, where would have acting taken him?

"Well, in those days I was in such a state of anxiety. I'd done **NICHOLAS AND ALEXANDRIA** (1971) and a few films, and then I was working a building site. I was going through a crisis but it was so wretched to be out of work. Then **DOCTOR WHO** came up; I got the job and signed up. It was great relief. I was terrified in the first few days before they drew the Contract up that someone might actually ask me what I was going to do with it because I honestly had no idea. Maybe I had no idea even at the end what I going to do with it. The spontaneity came from the fact that I didn't know what was going on. Sometimes you work on four or six scripts at a time. It was never shot in any narrative order."

During his time with DOCTOR WHO , Tom had eleven companions (including, later, his wife, Lalla Ward). Did he have a favourite?

"As far as I was concerned, I did like Elizabeth Sladen's sort of 'Pearl White' style of acting. I liked that. The young girl with the hero, and sometimes she'd help me out. I thought that was wonderful."

If Tom had had a choice in casting a companion for the Fourth Doctor?

"A companion? Oh, I'd have chosen someone like Miriam Margolyes or Patricia Hayes or Sylvia Coleridge."

And what about SHADA (1979) written by Douglas Adams. What do you remember from the abandoned serial?

"We never completed it, did we? Well, that was a terrible shame because there were some filming sequences there. I would have liked to have seen what we did. I wonder if they will ever cut some together and use it somehow. Perhaps, in a documentary? They couldn't get the cast back and I remember I was so depressed that afternoon they suddenly scotched it, and then Graham Williams suggested that we should go to Los Angeles Convention."

On the 25 October 1980, Tom announced that he was leaving DOCTOR WHO , and some eleven days later his successor, Peter Davison, was 'crowned'. Had he managed to watch the new series?

"No, I haven't seen one of them. I've been working in the theatre all the time and they've changed the running times. I don't know anything about it. Is it still successful? I suppose it is."

We indicated that the viewing figures were about 8 million.

"Well, that's stupendous. In fact, that's much more that I was getting at the end of my stint, I did try and judge it. After a while you know that enough's enough and maybe I stayed a season too long, I don't know."

Admittedly, we were apprehensive that the larger-than-life Tom Baker may regard us as 'freaks', irritated by the endless questioning. Our initial fears disappeared as we were welcomed with a handshake and a wide, happy grin. He seemed a cheerful character, so he must have had some very happy times (a phrase he accompanies with his autograph) over the seven years?

"Oh, on the whole thing was heaven. It was right down my street because I'm very interested in script editing and realising stories. Because I was the reference point in all of the stories I became very friendly with the Directors who worked on the series. I could be helpful to them because the scenes were very repetitious, and that fascinated me. So I began, a little by little, to be able to be helpful about how to vary set-ups, which is sometimes difficult as corridors are corridors, explosions are explosions, and as you know most of **DOCTOR WHO** is resolved by explosions."

DOCTOR WHO has always attracted a stunning array of guest-stars, with a number of them developing a noteworthy career. Had Tom enjoyed working with other leading actors?

"I didn't have a villain except right at the end with Anthony Ainley who's a great friend of mine. I know Tony very well indeed. I was delighted when he got the part of..what's he called?"

The Master.

"Yes, the Master. I was delighted when he got the part and I enjoyed that last one I did with him. Who else? I remember Sylvia Coleridge."

Played Amelia Ducat.

".who was in **THE SEEDS OF DOOM**, I think. She was an old lady in the story and we always had a good time. We laughed an awful lot together. The word got round, especially in the canteen, that it was fun to and we were able to get very actors in. We had Beatrix Lehman in once. I've forgotten which story which that was."

THE STONES OF BLOOD, we offered.

"That's right, and that was her last job, I think. She died soon after that."

Tom continued to discuss his options for companions.

"I wanted to have a very, very old lady as a companion because there were some wonderful older actresses about then. I also proposed to have a child who never spoke, just a 'snaggle-toothed' rather ugly child, maybe naked, who tagged along. He'd just shake or nod his head but was always there whilst I tried to get rid of him. I also wanted to do a story involving children; a rather old-fashioned one. A rescue job across mountains and things. The Producers were very kind to me but in fact most of my ideas, I'm afraid, weren't practical."

The eccentricity of Tom Baker was slowly seeping into us, and so, infected by this garrulous man, we asked a seemingly banal question.

Was Tom Baker his real name?

It was greeted with spontaneous laughter.

"Yes. When I was drama student the first thing I did was to practice my autograph on the assumption that lots of people were going to ask me for it. I used to write, *"Yours cordially, Jake Bromburg "*. I was going to be called Jake Bromburg and then I discovered there was a Jake Bromburg in Equity. So I had to use the name Tom Baker which was silly as that was my real name. I had to start practicing the signature all over again.

The next think I prepared was an OSCAR speech. I thought I had better get things in proportion."

Cheesy link coming up.

In the immortal words of the Fourth Doctor, *"It's the end but the moment has been prepared for."*

Our time was up but one last question was plucked the air. A predictable one, yes, but it had to be asked.

His favourite villain or alien encounter?

"I think that my favourite monster because it was so amusing was the 'walking tree' in **SEEDS OF DOOM**. The Krynoid, yes. That used to 'kill me' because I used to know some of the fellas who did the small parts and they were inside this tree thing shuffling about all night. It amused me no end."

I thought the rat in **THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG(1977)** was rather good because Stuart Fell, who's an actor, stuntman, acrobat and conjurer was in the rat costume. It was good."

That last, rather surprising, answer ended our interview.

We would like to thank Tom Baker for his valuable time, his generous manner and genial humour.

In addition, our thanks to Lynne Horton for arranging the interview at the York Theatre Royal.

EOH EXTRA

Tom Baker Interview (Part 2) - featured in Issue 2 of **EYE OF HORUS**

The official Fourth Doctor (Tom Baker) BBC postcard circa 1977

Tom Baker and Kevin Lindsay (Field Major Styre) fight in **THE SONTARAN EXPERIMENT** (1974)

On his favourite companion - Sarah-Jane Smith.

"I did like Elizabeth Sladen's sort of 'Pearl White' style of acting. I liked that. The young girl with the hero, and sometimes she'd help me out. I thought that was wonderful."

Tom Baker, Elisabeth Sladen and Sylvia Coleridge (as Amelia Ducat) in **THE SEEDS OF DOOM** (1976)

Teatime - Tom Baker in Douglas Adams' **SHADA** (1979)

Tom Baker and Anthony Ainley as The Master (in **LOGOPOLIS** - 1981)

"I was delighted when he got the part and I enjoyed that last one I did with him."

"It's the end but the moment has been prepared for."

Tom Baker with Matthew Waterhouse (Adric), Sarah Sutton (Nyssa) and Janet Fielding (Tegan Jovanka). The Watcher melds with the Fourth Doctor as part of 'regeneration'. **LOGOPOLIS** (1981)

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